

Lech Lecha – Was Lot a Tzaddik or a Rasha?

(given over by Rav E. Barclay in the year 5778 – written up by A. Deutsch)

Based on Chachma Umusar by Rav Simcha Zissel (חלק א', סימן קמה)

Generally we look at Lot in a non-favorable way:

1. Look you're together with Avrohom Avinu, you leave him to go on your own ways.
2. He goes to the worst place in the world: Sedom
3. He lets his cattle graze in other people's fields – which is gezel
4. He ends up sleeping with his daughters

We don't get a very favorable picture of this fellow.

What is amazing that Rav Simcha Zissel takes the opposite approach. He admittedly said we find things that are not so nice about Lot, but basically Lot's a good fellow.

Faults

1. Separated himself from Avrohom Avinu. Bereishis (13:14): "וה' אמר אל אברם אחרי הפרד" Rashi calls him a Rasha. "רש"י: כל זמן שהרשע עמו היה הדיבור פורש ממנו.
Pasuk 11: "ויסע לוט מקדם". Rashi (Medrash): "הסיע עצמו מקדמונו של עולם. אי אפשר לא אברם ולא באלקיו."
Pasuk 10: Seemingly Lot chose Sodom because of the good grazing for his cattle. But
Rashi: "מדרש אגדה: דורשה לגנאי: על שהיו שטופי זימה בחר לו לוט בשכונתם"
2. (19:33) "ותשקין את אביהן". Rashi: "אמר ר' לוי: כל מי שהוא להוט אחר בולמוס של עריות לסוף מאכילים אותו מבשרו."

Rav Simcha Zissel: But if you look carefully, you see that really deep down he was a nice fellow. He calls him a tzaddik gadol both between him and Hashem, and between him and his fellow man.

He performed hachnasas orchim with mesiros nefesh. Sedom had rules against hachnasas orchim, against tzdakah, against chesed. Sedom's approach: me, me, me. Pirkei Avos: whoever says "שלי שלי, שלך שלך זו מידת סדום". Whoever says "what's mine is mine, what's yours is yours this is the trait of Sedom". No one was allowed to give to anyone else.

Here come the guests (he doesn't know they are מלאכים) and he says "please, please come into my house" he falls on his face. "Don't go away"

And they say, "no, no. We're just passing through". "ויפצר במאד."

שהחזיק בם בעל כרחם להכניסם לביתו. Medrash Hagadol:

And he gave them food – סכנת נפשות. So we see he excelled in between man and his fellow.

Between man and Hashem: He was not מזנה at all the entire time that he was in Sedom.

What's the proof? When the people of Sedom came and wanted to do these filthy acts, so he said I'll give you my daughters שלא ידעו איש these daughters were never with any man. That means he was protecting his family the whole time in morality.

The Medrash of the woman put on the roof for doing chesed and stung to death by the bees – was Lot's daughter.

The only time we find Lot was immoral was the incident with his daughters.

When Avrohom Avinu davened for Sedom so he said please don't destroy Sedom – perhaps there's some Tzaddikim there. Ramban: Lot was there. Maybe there's a few others like him as well.

Michtav M'elياهو: Medrash עקיבא ד'ר' אותיות ד'ר' Yaakov should have separated from Eisav.

ומה לוט שצדיק גמר היה ועוסק בתורה ולא רצה אברהם לילך עמו. אז יעקב אבינו למה יש לך קשר עם עשיו?

The criticism of Lot by Chazal: that he wasn't careful enough. He was a Tzaddik. But he was over confident that he could resist the environment of Sedom. He was wrong in taking a chance. You should not go to a place like this. He thought he doesn't need to stay with Avrohom Avinu. I can be on my own.

When he became drunk the first time, he wasn't careful the second time. "I will be all right." Don't be overconfident.

Read things in the newspapers. "I would never do that". Don't trust yourself. Be careful.

Meseches Sukkah (52): In the end of days, Tzaddikim see the yetzer hara as a big mountain, reshoyim see it as a thin hair. Which is it? Sefas Emes: a mountain of hairs.

Dubno Magid: Hashem shows the yetzer hara in the way they thought it looks like.

The reshoyim look at the yetzer hara as small "it's nothing."

Ohr Yahel brings a story: In Kelm they used to be full of fire in Mussar. It was thunder, you can imagine, screaming and shouting. One day Rav Simcha Zissel came in and he banged on the table "is that how you talk to a gazlan?" "imagine you're in your house, and a burglar breaks in. You scream "save me!" They were shouting. "not good enough". He's a gazlan. Watch out for the yetzer hara – he's bigger than we imagine.